

Go Generic!

Savings and Quality

Did you know that the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires generics to be as safe and effective as their brand-name counterparts? That means you can save without compromising quality. We have prepared this Q & A to explain how you and your pocketbook can benefit by choosing to “go generic.”

Q. What exactly is a generic medication?

- A. A generic medication is an FDA-approved, chemically identical version of a brand-name medication. To receive this approval, a generic must contain identical amounts of the same active ingredients—in the same dosage form and strength—as its brand-name counterpart and be shown to work the same way in the body.

Q. Why are brand-name medications so much more expensive than generics?

- A. Drug companies typically pass along the high cost of research and development for new medications to the consumer. Brand-name medications are protected by patents for several years. However, once the patent of a new medication expires, other companies are permitted to manufacture a generic equivalent. Without those original costs, the generic version usually costs a lot less.

Q. When are prescriptions filled with generic medications?

- A. Over 60 percent of all prescriptions in the United States are now filled with generic

medications. Your doctor may choose to prescribe a generic for you, or, if he or she recommends a brand name, you can ask if a generic is available. Pharmacists will usually substitute a generic for a brand name, unless otherwise directed by the doctor or prohibited by applicable law.

Q. As a health plan member, does using generic medications really save me money?

- A. Most health plans and employers require member copays for medications. The copay amount for generics is generally less than for brand names. With generic prices on average 20 percent to 50 percent less than their brand-name counterparts, your choice of generics can help you keep your insurance premiums low and benefits high.

Sources:

U.S. Food and Drug Administration: www.fda.gov/cder/ogd/#Introduction. “What Are Generic Drugs?” Accessed October 2004.

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